ALERT

News from the UFMCC
on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.

June 1992

Dominican Republic Enlists MCC in HIV Education

The Rev. Howard Williams, Pastor of MCC Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, reports that the government agency, "Corta" has enlisted MCC in an educational outreach program to street hustlers. Originally, Corta tried to hold a large-scale educational meeting at MCC, targeting prostitutes, but no one showed up. As their next effort, the agency hired four former hustlers who attend MCC to educate prostitutes on a one-to-one basis and distribute condoms. While this effort has been more successful than the original education meeting, Rev. Williams reports that as fast as they convince hustlers to use condoms, there are more new hustlers on the street. Another dynamic affecting this education effort is that AIDS is seen as "tomorrow's problem." The immediate problem for most of these prostitutes and hustlers is starvation.

Amigos Sempre Amigos (ASA: Friends Always Friends) is a program for HIV+ persons which began out of Rev. Williams' home. This program provides classes for people with HIV, on dancing, sewing, art, and drama. These classes are primarily "to keep them occupied." Rev. Williams states that people in the Dominican Republic generally don't get diagnosed until after they're sick, "and by the time they're diagnosed, it's too late." ASA also collects and delivers fresh fruit and juices to hospitalized persons with HIV, because food is not provided for patients.

The attitude among government officials about HIV leaves much to be desired. There are no drugs available to treat HIV and its resulting opportunistic infections, since the drugs must be imported, and the government won't approve the transfer of money to import the drugs. The reason for this attitude, according to Rev. Williams, is that the government feels "they're going to die anyway." The doctor in charge of HIV research published an article which ended with his belief that HIV is "punishment from God." He, as well as other government officials, blame HIV on American tourists. Rev. Williams states that this is because "they don't want to take responsibility that their own people may be spreading it."

MCC Santo Domingo is a New Work of World Church Extension. In this small church, the pastor and members are taking responsibility for HIV prevention and education, and actively bringing much needed services to people with HIV/AIDS in the Dominican Republic. ▼

Rev. Dr. Karen Ziegler Directs AIDS Interfaith NY

The Rev. Dr. Karen Ziegler, formerly the pastor of MCC New York, started AIDS Interfaith New York (AINY) in July, 1991. Prior to that time, New York City did not have an AIDS Interfaith Network, except as a program of the AIDS Resource Center. This program was cut in June of 1991. Ziegler, knowing that there still existed a great need for such a program, started AIDS Interfaith New York with a core board of five people who had been active with the AIDS Resource Center Interfaith Program. This new board was expanded with eight representatives of a variety of faith groups.

Now Karen points to the variety on her Board with pride. In addition to Pernessa Seele, founder of the Harlem Week of Prayer, and Kevin Powell, Director of the Ecumenical Program of the Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, Board members include Orthodox and Reformed rabbis, Presbyterian, Catholic, and United Church of Christ pastors, several lay people from a variety of faiths, and a representative of Islam.

Rev. Dr. Karen Ziegler

AINY's Pastoral Care Referral Network provides clergy referrals for persons with HIV/AIDS. They have a large data base of pastors, priests, nuns, and rabbis available for counseling.

AINY also promotes witness by organizing the community for an annual citywide interfaith service involving hundreds of religious groups. Ziegler states, "This is a good tool for organizing and involving large numbers of people. People will at least come and pray."

Ziegler sees one of the main purposes of AIDS Interfaith to be "a bridge between the AIDS community and the faith communities. Many persons with HIV/AIDS won't approach a church, but they will call an AIDS agency. We help AIDS agencies access the resources of the religious communities. We also help people doing ministry, who may not know anything about AIDS, access information and education. We keep

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"The Impact of HIV on Communities of Color: A Blueprint for the Nineties"

(A Publication of the U.S. National Minority AIDS Council)

The U.S. National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) has published, for the first time in the history of HIV disease, a document that shows how communities of color are coping with issues related to HIV infection. "The impact of HIV on Communities of Color: A Blueprint for the Nineties" provides detailed information on the problems and issues encountered by communities of color in the area of HIV prevention and solutions to be acted upon by decision-makers at all levels of government.

The document is directed towards individuals with policy making authority. A series of meetings was coordinated by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, to bring together representatives of community based organizations serving people of color throughout the country.

Participant communities include African-American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Carribean, Latina/o, Pacific Islander, Puerto Rican, and U.S. Virgin Islander. Each community has organized their "blueprint" into two sections: "Problems and Barriers" followed by "Suggestions and Solutions."

The document is extremely well-organized, and will be an invaluable resource to anyone in the U.S. working in the HIV arena. NMAC Executive Director, Paul Kawata, suggests that HIV activists make sure that "your local elected officials receive and understand the contents of this document."

To obtain a copy of this document, contact the National Minority AIDS Council at 300 Eye Street, NE, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20002-4389; phone number (202) 544-1076. ▼

(Ziegler: On AIDS Interfaith NY, continued from pg 1)

raising the issue of spiritual support and pastoral care in AIDS agencies, and we keep raising AIDS issues in various congregations. There has been an enormous, shocking amount of silence in the churches. People don't talk about it, even in the neighborhoods where many people are dying."

"a bridge between the AIDS community and the faith communities."

But through the work of AINY, she sees people in different religious groups talking to each other across class boundaries, and breaking down a lot of walls. "We have seen parents and families being transformed through knowing their sons and daughters in the gay community for the first time. And because of the way the gay community responded, there's something about this epidemic which keeps breaking down walls. Persons with AIDS are getting the kind of help not available with other illnesses because of all that the gay community has set up."

Ziegler also has some criticism of the traditional churches: "They have not equipped people to deal with this level of suffering. Some persons with AIDS really believe that God is punishing them, and it doesn't matter whether they are gay or straight. They have been taught that they're sinners, that they're bad, and that bad things happen to bad people. Now, because of AIDS, people have been forced to come to terms with a loving God."

Ziegler reflected on some of the blessings of AINY: "Many clergy who are gay are getting to work together for the first time. They're less isolated from each other." A personal blessing to her has been the challenge to her stereotypes about Roman Catholic religious: "We stereotype them the way we have been stereotyped. The Catholic workers have done the most. I can always find a priest right away, and I'm really struck by that. And there is not a lot of self-interest involved in their ministries. Maybe if you are celibate, you're always ready to go. My work with them has made me really respect them, in a way I haven't before. It's radicalized me about the whole Catholic thing."

AINY has a number of clergy with AIDS, who are pretty secretive in doing their ministry. "It is not an us and them situation." Ziegler also reports that lay people are among the best movers and shakers. "The bridge has to include the whole spectrum."

Funding for AINY is a continuous challenge. Karen spends about a third of her time fundraising, writing grant proposals and soliciting memberships ($110 for organizations and $25 for individuals). "We raise our funds $100 at a time. It's a miracle that we've survived."

MCC New York has been an active member of AINY. A food pantry is MCC New York's main effort, and many people with AIDS receive sustenance and support through the pantry.

Ziegler feels that her work within MCC was "great training for ecumenical or interfaith work. In MCC we work with such a great variety, that we learn to respect and not be so scared of differences. The MCC experience of no money, office supplies, and trying to do everything with nothing was also good training for my current work."

The hardest part for Karen is the sense of isolation. She is the only staff person, and when AINY was housed at Riverside Church high up in a tower, "I felt like Ann Boleyn!" Now that her office is in St. Clemens' Episcopal Church, there are at least a few people around with whom she can interact.

Ziegler is leaving her position with AINY at the end of August, "not because I'm burned out, but because of an old dream." She will be attending nursing school in New York, while working part time. "I feel fine about leaving AINY. I'm good at grass-roots organizing, but now I'm ready to hand it over to someone with more experience in taking the organization to the next level.

"I find this fascinating work. French nuns, straight from the Middle Ages, come to talk to me with an incredible openness. I've worked with Muslims and Orthodox rabbis, and have found them amazingly open as a family of humanity. AIDS has kind of changed their hearts." ▼

US Government Slashes Funds for AIDS

"AIDS is no longer a priority" in the U.S. Congressional budget appropriations, according to sources close to the federal budgeting process. The Project Inform April newsletter, "PI Perspective," reports that the budget for clinical AIDS research "has in fact shrunk" when Congress cut an additional $10 million off President Bush's proposed budget, putting the clinical research budget at less than $125 million for the entire year. This compares to the Military budget of $882 million per day.

Following Magic Johnson's announcement of his HIV status, President Bush vowed to show how much he cares through the budget. Bush has claimed that the U.S. is spending $4 billion a year on AIDS. This is a misleading figure, because it represents all monies spent in the entire federal budget which have anything to do with AIDS, including Social Security, Medicaid, disability, education and prevention, Ryan White Care Money, and many other items. The Office of Management claims $1.2 billion for the U.S. budget on AIDS, but this is the figure for the National Institutes of Health AIDS budget, and according to "PI Perspective," "significant portions of this have little or nothing to do with AIDS research."

Project Inform claims the reason for these cutbacks, at a time when HIV infection is escalating exponentially in the U.S., are based on a set of beliefs widely held by members of Congress:

a. Everyone who has HIV is going to die, so why spend money on their care?

b. The epidemic can be stopped by behavior change, so why spend money on medical research?

c. The so-called "high risk groups" are second class citizens, and HIV will not spread beyond these groups in any significant numbers.

d. There is too much spending on AIDS, compared to other diseases such as cancer and heart disease.

The PI Perspective article disputes these myths by pointing out that HIV is an infectious disease, unlike cancer and heart disease; AIDS is rapidly spreading around the world; HIV infection rates are growing steadily, while for the most part cancer and heart disease statistics remain the same; and there already exist effective treatments for some cancers and heart disease, but not HIV. In fact, in the President's budget, cancer reseach is given double that granted to AIDS research. Staff people from the House Appropriations Committee are telling Representatives "that they don't hear much about AIDS these days, so the funding must be OK."

"Let the center burn"

The attitude of many administration officials can be summarized by statements from the Assistant Secretary of Health James Mason, and his spokesperson, William Grigg, writing in an article in the March 30, 1992, issue of Faulkner and Grey's *Medicine and Health* newsletter. Dr. Mason states, "there are certain areas which, when the goals of science collide with moral and ethical judgement, science has to take time out." In the same article, Grigg states, "When you're fighting a fire, you control it from the outside and let the center burn. The same holds true for medicine." Tim McFeeley, the Executive Director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, has written a broadly distributed letter to Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan, protesting the "callous disregard for the lives of more than a million Americans who currently live with HIV," represented by these "Let the center burn" statements from his department's officials.

Magic Johnson may have made President Bush sit up and take notice of AIDS, but the Bush Administration, as well as Congress, are actively slashing funds for AIDS research while taking photo opportunities with the former basketball star. PI Perspective suggests that "unless this trend can be changed, and changed quickly, the day of a true cure for AIDS will move ever more distant into the future, leaving AIDS as just another one of the unsolvable, one-telethon-per year diseases so common in this country."

To express your views on these issues, write to your Representatives, Senators, and the President. In addition, share your views with the two "most critical players" in the budget process: Rep. William Natcher, (D) of Kentucky, The US House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515 and Senator Tom Harken of Iowa, The US Senate, Washington, DC 20510. ▼

UFMCC AIDS Ministry Long Range Planning Task Force Meets

The Long-Range Planning Task Force for UFMCC AIDS Ministry held its first meeting in Los Angeles, CA, on Saturday, April 25, 1992. The Task Force received a charge by the Board of Elders to conduct a needs assessment of the Fellowship, as well as to develop recommendations for future program objectives.

The Task Force divided itself into two working groups. One group worked on redesigning the UFMCC AIDS Survey, which will help gather data to develop future goals and objectives. The other group designed a plan for focus groups, to be held throughout UFMCC, which will gather information from the "grass roots" constituency, also for creating future objectives of UFMCC AIDS Ministry.

The Task Force also discussed developing a new model for assisting churches who are confronting the crisis of a pastor being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. It was noted that several of the MCC's which have faced this situation have never fully recovered, and there has been little help or answers available from the Fellowship or District levels. The Task Force plans to develop recommendations for a method of bringing Fellowship and District help to a local church in crisis.

This preliminary work of the Task Force will continue through the sub-groups, as well as a scheduled conference call in October, and a two-day meeting in January, 1993. At that time, the Task Force will complete their assignments, and develop recommendations for consideration by the General Council, and ultimately, the General Conference in July, 1993.

Present at this meeting were: Sr. Rodolfo Albarran, a Philosophy Professor from Mexico City; Dr. Lori Dick, an

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"Exploring New Frontiers:" A Chronicle of and For People With HIV Concerns

First published in November, 1990, "Exploring NEW FRONTIERS" is a publication "dedicated to the positive side of the HIV/AIDS pandemic." Individuals are invited to share their stories of "growth, learning, courage, love and the raising of one's consciousness" that arise out of their journeys with HIV/AIDS. "We are not looking for people with literary skills, just people to tell stories from their hearts," says Managing Editor/Founder George (White-Eagle) Gladis.

The publication is currently distributed in Germany, Taiwan, France, Canada, Central America, and the Phillippines, in addition to the U.S., and the publisher hopes to expand distribution to many other countries as well. Volunteer translators as well as writers are being sought.

For further information, contact "Exploring NEW FRONTIERS" at 1831 - 47th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94122, phone (415) 665-7396. ▼

Scholarships for Student Clergy with HIV/AIDS

Good Samaritan MCC in Whittier, CA has announced the creation of Proclamation Press, which will publish a quarterly theological journal called "Life in Christ." The proceeds from "Life in Christ" will go towards the "Good Samaritan Clerical Scholarship Fund," which will be used exclusively to provide scholarships for student clergy who are HIV+, who have AIDS, or any other life-threatening illness.

In a press release announcing the scholarship program, Rev. Gina Chapman, pastor of Good Samaritan MCC, states, "Good Samaritan MCC recognized the need to give a helping hand to those seeking licensure who have life-threatening illness, because, unlike those students who are healthy and expect to live a normal life-span and can save their money to attend Samaritan College's Orientation to Pastoring, saving money over a period of time is a luxury that persons with AIDS or other life-threatening illnesses do not have."

"Life in Christ" will be published quarterly, and subscribers will also receive an annual publication, "Biblical Scholarship," which will contain "some of the best exegesis papers written by the UFMCC's own student clergy," according to Douglas Bull, Managing Director of Proclamation Press.

Subscriptions to "Life in Christ" are $22.50 per year, and can be ordered by writing Good Samaritan MCC, 6709 S. Greenleaf Avenue, Suite 209, Whittier, CA 90606. ▼

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osteopathic physician who has just been recommended for licensing as MCC clergy; Rev. Elder Don Eastman, Executive Director of UFMCC AIDS Ministry, and chair of the Task Force; Rev. Jim Mitulski, pastor of MCC San Francisco; Ms. Jane Rogers, AIDS Information Coordinator for the UFMCC South Central District; Rev. Paul Tucker, Director of AIDS Ministry at Cathedral of Hope MCC in Dallas, TX; and Mr. Larry Young, Board Member of the Community Unity and Health and Wholeness Project of MCC Dayton Parish. Rev. Steve Pieters served as staff for the Task Force meeting. ▼

ACT UP to Protest U.S. Immigration Policies in Amsterdam

ACT UP/San Francisco and ACT UP/Golden Gate have announced plans to travel to the Eighth International Conference on AIDS in Amsterdam "to call attention to the restrictive immigration and travel policies of the United States. The international conference is the crucial time and place to call attention to the public health consequences of the U.S. policies. During the conference, the committee is planning several high-visibility presentations, and hopes to mobilize global support for the removal of all HIV-based immigration restrictions."

UFMCC will be watching this effort with great interest, since the restrictive immigration policies make it highly improbable that Fellowship meetings and conferences will be held in the United States until the immigration ban of HIV+ persons is lifted. (See the April '92 ALERT for further details).

The ACT UP action is being coordinated by the Immigration Working Group, and is asking for help through cash donations, a portable computer and fax equipment, frequent flyer miles, and lodging and office space near the conference site. To offer assistance, call or fax Tomas Fabregas, at (510) 451-9354, between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m., Pacific Time. ▼

Canadian Phone Number for Clinical Trials Information

AIDS Treatment News, (Issue #146, March 6, 1992) reports that there is a computerized registry of HIV/AIDS clinical trials in Canada, maintained by the Canadian HIV Trials Network, a service of the Canadian government. Canadians can receive information by calling (604) 631-5327 (collect if necessary), or fax requests to (604) 631-5210. Information is available in either French or English, and the service is operated weekdays between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Pacific Time.

According to ATN, the registry "includes a brief description of each trial, centers running the trial, brief inclusion/exclusion criteria, and where to phone (locally) for more information." ▼

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